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## FATHERS BADIN AND NERINCKX AND THE DOMINICANS IN KENTUCKY

### A LONG MISUNDERSTOOD EPISODE IN AMERICAN CHURCH HISTORY<sup>1</sup>

It is not without considerable regret that we undertake to give the readers of the CATHOLIC HISTORICAL REVIEW an historical account of the early Dominicans of Kentucky in their well-known misunderstanding with Revs. Stephen T. Badin and Charles Nerinckx, two of the most noted pioneer missionaries of that state. Of itself, the episode would deserve no more than a casual reference in a history of those friars; but, unfortunately, Father Nerinckx's first biographer has badly prejudiced the whole story.

Nor is this all. Following the one-sided presentation of the case found in the letters of Fathers Badin and Nerinckx, that author not merely gives his readers to understand that the blame for the trouble which those two zealous priests experienced in Kentucky, is largely to be laid at the door of Father Edward D. Fenwick, later the first Bishop of Cincinnati, and his companions in religion; he even insinuates that the charges of officiousness, of want of zeal and of laxity, both religious and ministerial, may justly be imputed to these early Dominicans.<sup>2</sup> For forty years

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<sup>1</sup> The sources used for this article, besides those directly referred to in the text and notes, are principally: Archives of Saint Joseph's Province of Dominicans; Saint Rose's Priory, Springfield, Kentucky; Saint Joseph's Priory, Somerset, Ohio; Archives of the Dominican Master General, Rome; the Dominican Fathers, London, England, and the Baltimore Archdiocesan Archives. Among the books consulted are WEBB, *Centenary of Catholicity in Kentucky*; VOLZ, *A Century's Record*; DECOURCY-SHEA, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*; SHEA, *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, Vols. ii and iii; *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi*, Vols. ii, iii, iv, v, xi.

<sup>2</sup> MAES, *Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, pp. 160-184. Father Maes, when writing of this unpleasantness, is singularly unfair to these early Dominicans. Parts of Father Nerinckx's letters that are essential to show his extravagance and inner spirit, are left out of the translations. In some places, words and even phrases are omitted or added (still they are in quotation marks), without any indication of such tampering; or are so changed as materially to affect the sense of the originals, to make them the more plausible, and to render them the more telling against the missionary's imaginary enemies. Designedly do we call them imaginary, for a careful perusal of the documents in the case shows them to have been largely such. In some instances Father Maes makes the documents practically his own. See originals in DOCUMENTS, pp. 66-88.

this unfair and injurious representation of the friars has gone its rounds, receiving all too wide a credence and tarnishing the fair names of men who have deserved well of the American Church. For this reason, now that the Diocese of Cincinnati is about to celebrate its centenary, we feel constrained to give the public the present article in justification of Ohio's first ordinary. Yet, after all, it is perhaps no more than a belated contribution to our ecclesiastical literature demanded in the interest of historic truth and fair-mindedness.

Rev. Edward D. Fenwick, O.P., was born in Maryland, but was sent in his youth to the college of the English Dominicans, Bornheim, Belgium. On the completion of his classical course the young American entered the Order to which his preceptors belonged. This was in 1788. One of his prime purposes in this step was to establish the religious institute which he had learned to love, in his native Maryland, that it might aid in the diffusion of the Catholic religion through the United States. Basing his plan on that of the English fathers at Bornheim, the young American conceived the idea of devoting his part of the paternal estate to founding a house of the Order of Saint Dominic in the former palatinate of Lord Baltimore. This was to be the beginning of his work, a center whence missionaries might go forth in all directions to carry the light of the Gospel to his fellow-countrymen. Connected with the house he would have a college for the education of youth. This, he felt, would aid in supplying the pious enterprise with vocations and means of support.<sup>3</sup>

Fifteen years, however, passed before the young divine found the circumstances propitious for beginning his long-cherished design. In the meantime, the French Revolution had thrown a gloom over, if not paralyzed, the religious institutes in France and Belgium. This, together with the anti-Order prejudices in England, but especially the fact that all religious in the countries under French domination were made subject to the diocesan

<sup>3</sup> Rev. E. D. Fenwick, Carshalton, England, to Rev. R. L. Concanen, Rome, March 15, 1803, January 3, April 14, August 29, and (London) September 1, 1804 (Archives of the Dominican Master General, Codex xiii, 731); Fenwick, Carshalton, to Bishop Carroll, January 12 and May 5, 1804 (Baltimore Archives, Case 3, R 1 and 2); Concanen to Fenwick, November 19, 1803 (Archives of the Dominican Fathers, London); PALMER, *Anglia Dominicana* (MSS.), Part III, p. 722 (*ibid.*) and *Obituary Notices of the Friar-Preachers of the English Province*, p. 26.

ordinaries, turned the minds of some of Father Fenwick's English confrères towards his American project, which had been warmly espoused by the authorities at Rome and heartily welcomed by Bishop Carroll. These were Revs. Samuel T. Wilson, Robert A. Angier and William R. Tuite, men of much learning and high standing, as well as of great piety.<sup>4</sup>

Fathers Fenwick and Angier, the first to come to America, arrived in November, 1804, and were cordially received by the father of the American hierarchy. Fenwick's design had been to make his foundation in his native Maryland. Great, therefore, was his disappointment when he learned that Bishop Carroll had promised them to Kentucky. This had been done largely in response to the distressed and heartfelt appeals for priests from the Catholics of that state and its lone missionary, Rev. Stephen T. Badin.<sup>5</sup> Father Fenwick, however, was too good and zealous an ambassador of Christ, as well as too thoroughly trained a religious, to hesitate to go wherever the voice of authority or the salvation of souls called him. Accordingly, in the spring of 1805, at the request of Doctor Carroll, he journeyed on to the west to learn what prospects were held out by that country for his proposed institution. On his arrival in Kentucky, he was received with open arms by both the people and Father Badin. Indeed, this veteran missionary was so pleased with Fenwick that he offered to turn over his own and the church lands in the state to the friars, and begged to be received into the Order of Saint Dominic. On May 15, 1805, he wrote to Bishop Carroll earnestly urging him to give his consent to both these proposals.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Fenwick's letters as in note 3. Father Wilson, then on his way to Kentucky, writing to Father Concanen from Georgetown, October 14, 1805, says: "Ever since the notice I received from our Archbishop, Monsr. Rocquelaure, that all religious in France, being now secularized by His Holiness, were entirely under his jurisdiction, I have turned my thoughts to America, where a new prospect opens of labouring with success" (Archives of the Dominican Master General, Codex xiii, 731). How different this true reason for his coming to the United States from that excogitated by Maes (*op. cit.*, pp. 171-72). For Cardinal Caprara's decree secularizing all religious in France, see VERMEERSCH, *De Religiosis Institutis et Personis*, Vol. ii, p. 466.

<sup>5</sup> Several letters of Father Badin and the people of Kentucky in the Baltimore Archives show how they sought to obtain priests for that mission.

<sup>6</sup> Fenwick, Piscataway, Maryland, to Concanen, August 1, 1805 (Archives of the Dominican General, as above). Father Badin's letter referred to is in the Baltimore Archives, Case 1, G 9. See DOCUMENTS, p. 66.

Satisfied with the promises offered by that new state for the enterprise, Father Fenwick returned to Maryland to report to his ordinary and to Rome, to await further authorization from the Order's General and the coming of the other two recruits, and to make preparations for settling his little band of priests in the west. On August 1, 1805, he wrote to Rev. R. L. Concanen, one of the assistants to the Order's General, telling him of the good prospects for the pious undertaking in Kentucky, and of Father Badin's proposals. These latter, he says, Bishop Carroll "applauds and consents to."<sup>7</sup> The friar's heart was further gladdened by the arrival, early in September, of Fathers Wilson and Tuite. A month later, came letters from Rome empowering Doctor Carroll to proceed with the foundation of the new Dominican province. Fenwick was detained in Maryland by the settlement of his paternal estate until June or July, 1806. Angier, at the request of Bishop Carroll, was left there to continue his labors on the missions until his presence became indispensable in Kentucky, and did not join his brethren until the fall of 1807. But Wilson and Tuite started on their westward journey at once (October, 1805), reaching their destination in the last days of the year.

In the meantime, however, July 18, 1805, Rev. Charles Nerinckx, a Belgian priest, had arrived in Kentucky. That indefatigable missionary, as a later page will show, brought from his native land a strong prejudice against the English Dominicans of Bornheim which he had imbibed on mere hearsay. He knew none of them. In Kentucky, an intimate friendship soon arose between him and Father Badin. Nor was the new missionary slow to instil his bias into the mind of his friend. It was clearly under this influence that the French priest, October 5-12, 1805, just a few days before Fathers Wilson and Tuite started on their journey to Kentucky, wrote to Bishop Carroll a letter which is a perfect travesty of what he had written to the same prelate in the previous May. Meanwhile, it must be noted, he had seen no Dominican. Yet all is now changed. The French missionary has turned a complete somersault of both mind and heart. It would be not only unwise, but dangerous and uncanonical to

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<sup>7</sup> See note 6.

confer upon the friars the woodlands belonging to the Church in Kentucky. The reasoning and canon law which he adduces for the change must have provoked the venerable prelate to a smile. Five months before, a religious Order was Kentucky's great need. Now an Order might be even a peril to its Church.<sup>8</sup>

Bishop Carroll, it would seem, was not at all pleased with Father Badin's censorious letter announcing his change of mind. At least, another letter from the same missionary, written more than six months afterwards, is proof positive that the venerable prelate never answered it, or even acknowledged its receipt.<sup>9</sup> Father Badin goes so far in this document (October 5-12, 1805), as to tell his ordinary that Father Nerinckx "does strongly suspect the purity of their [the Dominicans'] faith." This was in consequence of the preconceived prejudices of which we have spoken. Then we read: "He is so much disheartened at the thought of becoming partaker with them in the sacred ministry, that he spoke with resolution of his leaving the State, if the Dominicans trouble themselves otherwise than with a college." But it should be noted in this connection that, although Bishop Carroll did not even acknowledge the receipt of this letter, he took occasion of a later one from the same source to justify the friars, and to assure the other missionaries of their untainted faith and righteousness.<sup>10</sup>

Such was the bias which the Dominicans encountered in Kentucky. In view of it, one might expect almost any action or statement on the part of the two clergymen who had preceded them. Father Wilson tells us that, on his and Father Tuite's arrival, the people were publicly warned against them. Although Father Nerinckx had signified his intention of leaving the missions, should these friars undertake any ministerial labors, hardly have Wilson and Tuite set foot in the state when he begins to belittle their zeal and to accuse them of refusing to bear the

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<sup>8</sup> This document has two parts. One is dated October 5, the other October 12, 1805. By an oversight, it has been indexed as two letters, and placed under G 10 and G 11, Case 1 of the Baltimore Archives. It is printed, but with a notable omission, in the *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia*, xxiii, 166-174. See DOCUMENTS, pp. 68-73.

<sup>9</sup> Badin to Bishop Carroll, May 28, 1806 (Baltimore Archives, Case A Special, L 14).

<sup>10</sup> Badin to Carroll as in the preceding note.

heat and the burden of the day, of seeking an easy life, and of caring little for the salvation of souls. He declares that, according to their own words, none of them intend to toil on the missions, that their only object seems to be to extend their own Order, and that, therefore, their presence in Kentucky will be of scant benefit to the Church.<sup>11</sup>

But in view of the fact that it was Father Fenwick's positive intention that some of his confrères should labor on the missions, and that, as may be seen from all his letters, one of his prime objects in the establishment of the new province of Dominicans was to raise up missionaries for the country, it seems most improbable that any of the friars ever gave the Flemish clergyman the information he claims to have received from them. Fathers Wilson and Tuite, the first to arrive in Kentucky, were specially designed to teach in the college and novitiate which they proposed founding. This, if anything, must have been what they told Father Nerinckx; and their words were doubtless magnified into the sweeping assertions found in his letters. Nor must we forget that, even after the arrival of Bishop Flaget and the days of a more plentiful supply of priests, the Friars Preacher continued to devote themselves to apostolic labors to such an extent as greatly to interfere with the welfare of their college and convent. All this, together with their well-known fruitful zeal, their spirit of self-sacrifice, their privations for Christ's sake, evidenced by many documents that might be laid before the reader, proves beyond question how groundless and gratuitous are Father Nerinckx's declarations.

Not in a single line of his early letters—and they are many—does the zealous Belgian missionary (for truly zealous he was) speak a kind word of the friars. It is, therefore, passing strange to see the author of Father Nerinckx's first life, with the documents before him—he cites none to prove the statement—write: "Fathers Badin and Nerinckx had hailed their advent with genuine delight, and gave unsparing and oft-repeated praise to

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<sup>11</sup>Father Wilson to Bishop Carroll, August 25, 1806 (Baltimore Archives, Case 8 B, L 6); Nerinckx to same, February 6, 1806 (*ibid.*, Case 8A, U2); Nerinckx to Joseph Peemans, Louvain (?), as quoted by Peemans in an account of the missions of Kentucky for the Propaganda (Propaganda Archives, America Centrale, Vol. iii, ff. 235-260); MAES, *op. cit.*, pp. 168-69.

these new co-laborers.”<sup>12</sup> Withal, it is worthy of note, that if Fenwick’s apostolic labors were placed on one scale-pan of a balance, and those of Nerinckx on the other, great and fruitful as these latter surely were, those versed in the ecclesiastical history of Kentucky and Ohio cannot doubt but that the beam would tip in the friar’s favor.

Many things conspired with Father Nerinckx’s preconceived prejudices to intensify his dislike for the fathers after their arrival in Kentucky. The Rev. Walter H. Hill, S.J., in a letter to the Hon. Benj. Webb, observes: “Some one writes to me, speaking of Father Nerinckx and the Dominicans: ‘Father Nerinckx, with all his humility, was too sensitive.’”<sup>13</sup> So he was. No sooner had the fathers arrived in Kentucky than the people, because of the undue rigor to which they were subjected by the other missionaries, flocked to them from far and wide for the reception of the Sacraments. This, as may be seen from his own letters, Father Nerinckx, pious as he was, could not bear with equanimity; nor can there be any doubt but that his pique added poignancy to his pen.<sup>14</sup>

So, too, as Father Hill further remarks, the good priest’s notorious letter of June 30, 1808, shows that he was deeply offended by the loss of Saint Ann’s Parish, the largest in the State, through the Dominicans. But this was no fault of theirs. Although he had been in charge of Saint Ann’s hardly a year when it was placed under the permanent care of the friars by the vicar-general, Father Badin, possibly by Bishop Carroll himself, it was Father Nerinckx’s favorite of all the missions. His chagrin, it may have been, was all the greater because he was

<sup>12</sup> MAES, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. Walter H. Hill, S.J., Saint Louis, to Hon. Benj. Webb, July 9, 1880 (Archives of Saint Joseph’s Province).

<sup>14</sup> The way in which Maes (*op. cit.*, p. 172) attempts to explain the popularity of the Dominicans in Kentucky, reminds one strikingly of Prescott’s elucidations of the Church’s influence on the faithful. “Drawn [he says] by the novel ceremonial of the Dominican Order, and its picturesque dress, which, as experience teaches, are powerful attractions in the eyes of people unused to such interesting displays, the Catholics flocked to them from far and wide.” Maes’ un-Catholic bit of philosophy, however, falls quite flat, when it is recalled that the people began to “flock” to the friars when there were only two of them (Wilson and Tuite) in the State, and while these lived miles apart. Surely there was then little chance for “display” of “novel ceremonial,” etc. The true explanation of the friars’ popularity is the more orthodox and kindlier ministrations which the people received at their hands.



thus thwarted in the plan which he had conceived of erecting a brick church in this settlement.<sup>15</sup>

Father Badin was a Frenchman; Father Nerinckx a Belgian. Three of the Dominicans were British. The other was an American; but he was of English origin, and had spent the greater part of his life abroad with Englishmen. Nearly all the people in Kentucky were Americans, but of English descent. Now experience and history both teach us that different nationalities are often as so many misfitting cogs that prevent even the mill of Christ from running smoothly. This is why we have had friction in church circles through all the country, where foreigners have gathered in sufficient numbers to give play to national prejudices. Documents leave no room for doubt that such an influence had its part in the disagreement of which we speak.

Father Nerinckx's letters show that with his love of God he joined an intense attachment to his countrymen. This led to the desire of surrounding himself with clergymen from his native land, and caused him to conceive the plan of making at least a part of Kentucky a mission principally, if not entirely, in charge of Belgian priests.<sup>16</sup> One cannot in reason blame him for so laudable an aim. But when he suffered himself, as he certainly did, to be so incensed at the Dominicans whose presence was an obstacle to his purpose, as to decry them in all manner of ways, he cannot be freed from censure. This is all the more true because these friars had gone to Kentucky at the earnest solicitation of Bishop Carroll, who had promised them to that desolate part of his diocese before Father Nerinckx arrived in America.

Possibly the most insidious, crafty and disloyal heresy the Church has had to combat was that of Jansenism, so named from Cornelius Jansen, Bishop of Ypres. It taught that Christ died for only the elect, whose salvation alone He willed; and that nothing good done by the reprobate—it held positive reprobation—can avail them aught in the way of eternal life. One can

<sup>15</sup> Father Nerinckx to Bishop Carroll, June 30, 1808 (*Baltimore Archives*, Case 8 A, U 5).—The mission of Saint Ann, it seems certain, was attended by Father Wilson from early in 1806, though it appears to have remained under Father Nerinckx's jurisdiction until after Fenwick's arrival in the summer of the same year.

<sup>16</sup> This is evident from many of Nerinckx's letters, from Peemans' account to the Propaganda, and from Maes' biography.

readily see to what excesses these teachings opened the door. In a word, Jansenism was Puritanic in spirit, and savored much of the arid and levelling doctrines of Calvinism. Like Gallicanism, it sought to restrain the Pope's authority over the Church in favor of the bishops and temporal rulers. The adherents of this sect looked to the accidentals of religion rather than to the essentials. In practice, they placed discipline—fasting, for instance, penance and mortification—before the life-giving Sacraments of Christ. Thus, again, Jansenism was a species of Christian Pharisaism. Jansenists overlooked the proper part of the heart and the feelings in worship, preached a discouraging rigorism which they adorned with the names of virtue and austerity, and denounced as laxists all who did not subscribe to their gloomy and austere views. Their principles, quite naturally, led to extreme severity in their moral doctrine and in the administration of the Sacraments.

Although the doctrines of Jansenism were condemned time and again, its followers long held their ground, without renouncing their errors. This they did through chicane and by pretense of following the practices of primitive Christianity, of remaining Catholics and of belonging to the Church, in spite of the Church. Their support of the absolutist theories of the times won them the favor of statesmen, while the cloak of austerity with which they colored their teachings, as is ever the case, appealed to many of the faithful with ascetic temperaments. In this way, even the leaven of true Catholic doctrine eventually became tainted with the poison. Confession and communion, the great channels of grace instituted by Christ for salvation, were administered with such severity as to cause them to be woefully neglected. There were, it is true, many holy persons who were imbued with the spirit of Jansenism. But their errors were through no fault of their own, for they imbibed them in spite of themselves. They were in good faith. Withal, had not the Church been divine, Jansenism would have dealt her a death-blow.

As Father Maes correctly states, it cannot be denied that the French and Belgian clergy of the eighteenth century “were considerably tainted by the Jansenistic teachings;” and that the “bitter fruits” of this may still be seen in the neglect of the Sac-

raments by the people and the severity of the priests in the sacred tribunal. Through no fault of theirs, Fathers Badin and Nerinckx had heard this doctrine preached from the pulpit, had found it in their books, had been taught it in the seminary. The Belgian clergyman had practiced it in his ministerial duties at home for twenty years before coming to the New World.<sup>17</sup>

These Puritanic principles and exaggerated notions of severe morality they brought to America. In Kentucky their zeal led them to practice the same severity of discipline, and the same rigorism both in preaching and in the administration of the sacraments to which they had been accustomed abroad, but which were not suited to the Anglo-Saxon portion of the New World. The older Catholics of Kentucky had not been used to such extremes in Maryland; and the younger did not always take kindly to them. For this reason, even before the arrival of Father Nerinckx, the French missionary was rather disliked than loved. Many, as may be seen, not only from the letters of the Dominicans to Bishop Carroll, but from those of the other two priests, seldom approached the Sacraments; some never. When Father Nerinckx, stern and unbending by nature, came to the State, his influence seems to have induced his companion to become more rigorous and severe than ever.

Father Nerinckx possessed a calm demeanor, had a quiet even way, and was of serious bearing. This, together with his zeal, piety and personal austerity, made his ministrations more acceptable to the faithful than were those of Father Badin. By many, especially those of an ascetic temperament, the former was loved and admired as a spiritual guide. The latter, as is admitted, was vivacious and changeable, and given to harsh, cutting language. He had not a judicial temperament. Often he was imprudent. Withal, he was not less zealous than his friend. It would seem that his desire to emulate the Belgian missionary increased his stringency and brought about that discontent which, when it was rumored that he would likely be chosen for the proposed diocese of Kentucky, led to many complaints against him to Bishop Carroll. But before this, Father Nerinckx had begun to write bitter things against the Dominicans to the same prelate. Father Badin soon followed suit. How-

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<sup>17</sup> MAES, *op. cit.*, pp. 169-170.

ever, as the documents in the archives of Baltimore are both numerous and long, we can do no more here than select four, two from each missionary, which suffice to give a fair idea of their correspondence in this matter.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, Father Nerinckx's letters of June 2, 1806, and June 30, 1808, are so harsh, so reproachful alike of the Dominicans and the people, and so full of invective that, unless we knew otherwise from his contemporaries, they would convict him of no little conceit and shatter one's belief in his humility, piety, charity and spirit of mortification. As it is, they prove that his judgment was often at fault, that he was sensitive in the extreme, and that he gave too ready an ear to idle gossip. His determination to gain his point led him to employ language that was not only harsh and extravagant, but even violent. If the missionary's letters are any index to his dealings with the faithful, his ministrations could not have been otherwise than very distasteful to the greater number. In short, an ultra rigorist spirit shines out on every page. To those who have seen the original documents, and are acquainted with traditions still living in Kentucky, there can be no doubt as to the correctness of the statements which Father Wilson, writing on a pastoral matter, makes to Bishop Carroll:

No place in the world, dear Sir [he says], is more in want of a prudent Bishop than Kentucky, where thousands are living in constant neglect of the Sacraments, through the too great zeal, I fear, of the former missionaries. Young people are not admitted to them without a solemn promise of not dancing *on any occasion whatever*, which few will promise, and fewer still can keep. All priests that allow of dancing are publicly condemned to hell. . . . People taught that every kiss lip to lip between married persons is a mortal sin. . . . Women refused absolution for their husbands permitting a decent dance in their house—not to mention a thousand things far more ridiculously severe.<sup>19</sup>

Owing to their length, we can only touch on the more salient points of the two letters of Father Nerinckx selected for discussion. In that of June 2, 1806, he says that Father Badin must now admit that he has seen the realization of his (Nerinckx's) prophecy in regard to the Dominicans. They differ much from

<sup>18</sup> The letters of Father Badin and Nerinckx to Bishop Carroll that touch on this topic would make a portly volume. They run from 1805 to 1810 and are found in various cases of the diocesan archives of Baltimore.

<sup>19</sup> The date of this letter is August 25, 1806 (Baltimore Archives, as in note 5).

Badin in speculative theology, and wholly in some points of practice. Father Nerinckx knows not how much it is expedient to say, yet he can positively assert that: "Perhaps they will multiply the nation; but they will neither increase the joy nor renew the face of the earth." The wanton grow more insolent. Those who had been held in check by fear, if not by love, now that the lines are loosened, rush forth with stiffened necks, boasting that they have discovered the city of refuge. The other friars (Fenwick and Angier) "are expected to bring plenary indulgences that will not only remit penalties due to sin already forgiven, but prevent the incurring of guilt at all."<sup>20</sup>

Father Tuite, he says, though less learned than his colleague, appears to be more given to discipline. The other (Father Wilson) appears to be a man of great learning; but his learning "has led him, not to madness, but to a laxity which, for want of the flavor of salt, may perhaps be called infatuation." "Father Badin terms him a laxist; the people call him easy. Whether he should be placed among the extreme laxists I do not wish to be the judge. I am considered a rigorist; Father Badin both more rigorous and harsher." Father Nerinckx, however, seemed quite unable to realize that his practice was at all harsh or stinging.

Before his arrival in Kentucky, the missionary proceeds to say, Father Badin's discipline in regard to matrimony had been the occasion of much complaint and murmuring. But since Father Wilson's coming, he declares, everything in this matter is decided as if it concerned mere brutes, and without any regard whatever to the sacramental character and sanctity of the married state.<sup>21</sup>

Father Nerinckx does not believe that the Dominicans will succeed in founding a convent in Kentucky, as they are not willing to commence in a humble way; and he foresees that they will obtain but little financial aid from the people. Besides, he adds, "they are lovers of themselves, and are unduly terrified

<sup>20</sup> Nerinckx to Carroll, June 2, 1806 (Baltimore Archives, Case 8 A, U 1).

<sup>21</sup> Here Father Nerinckx writes at considerable length, and in a manner that must be pronounced shocking. One of his expressions is: "Ab illius R[everendi] P[atris] adventu res matrimonialis. . . . omnino pro votis equorum ac mulorum in parte carnali decisa est." Maes (*op. cit.*, p. 175) is guilty of considerable juggling in his rendition of this part of the missionary's letter. See DOCUMENTS, p. 80.

at the burden of the day and the heats." Should they, however, succeed in making a foundation, it is his earnest wish that some man imbued with the spirit of religious observance, and quickened with a zeal for souls, should be sent from another house of the Order, and placed in charge. For what real good, he continues, or what glory to religion, can be expected, if such men, far removed from a superior who can act as censor to their lives and as guardian of religious discipline, are placed over the people to form them to their own rule of life? "Be it far from me [he adds, however] to say that they are bad; but I do think that they are animated with too little zeal for religious observance."

This is certainly a severe arraignment. Its only palliation is that Father Nerinckx had been made purblind by the influences of which we have spoken. Apart from every other reason, the very lives of these early Dominicans prove these extravagant statements and veiled accusations too absurd to be believed by even the most credulous. These early fathers had as many, if not more, hardships and privations to bear than the Flemish missionary; they bore them with greater humility and patience. Father Nerinckx asserts more than once that he writes as he does out of his love of God and zeal for souls. One almost wonders if this can be true—if his bitter words were not largely inspired by umbrage and disappointment at the loss of his favorite parish and at seeing the prospect of his proposed Belgian mission dwindle. Be that as it may, history, we think, must pronounce the fathers' zeal and love of God equal to his. Certainly the historian knows that Dominican theology is rather severe than lax. It was for this reason that Father Concanen, when he heard of this accusation, took occasion to observe in writing to Archbishop Carroll:

I wish to be remembered to Father Fenwick and his companions at Kentucky. I am surprised at the controversy arisen between them and Rev. Mr. Badin. It is the first time I ever heard of the Dominicans being accused of lax doctrine. It must be that that worthy and zealous man, Mr. Badin, has poisoned his mind by reading Jansenistical authors; for surely the sweet and lenient spirit of the Church abhors equally the extremes of laxity and rigour.<sup>22</sup>

Under the circumstances, it was fortunate for the early Church

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<sup>22</sup> This letter is dated Rome, August 9, 1809, and is in Case 2, W7 of the Baltimore Archives.

of Kentucky that these friars had much of the tenderness of heart and kindly disposition characteristic of Saint Thomas of Aquin and Francis de Sales. Of Father Wilson, against whom these complaints were principally made, and whom Bishop Flaget called the shining light of his diocese, Bishop M. J. Spalding writes:

Of refined and highly polished manners, as well as amiable, modest and learned, he was universally admired and beloved. He was of retiring habits, and much devoted to prayer and study. He was one of the most learned divines who ever emigrated to America. . . . He died, in the same odour of sanctity in which he had lived, in the summer of 1824. Long and reverently will the Catholics of Kentucky remember his virtues, which are freshly embalmed in the recollection of his brethren. He was a bright ornament of an illustrious Order, and its early history in the United States is identified with his biography.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, that distinguished theologian and scholar might have felt complimented at being considered in the same light that Saint Paul was considered by the pagan Festus, mad because of his learning. "Paul [said Festus], thou art beside thyself: much learning doth make thee mad. And Paul said: I am not mad, most excellent Festus, but I speak words of truth and soberness" (Acts, xxvi, 24-25). The letters of all these early friars show them to have been gentlemen, as well as possessed of truly priestly characters and scholarly attainments. In regard to their spirit of religious discipline and observance, of which the Belgian clergyman could have known nothing—for he refused to associate with them—no more need be said than that one marvels why he was so critical when it is remembered that only two of them were then in Kentucky, and that they lived some twenty miles apart. Wilson was at Saint Ann's; Tuite near Bardstown. It is still more strange to find Father Nerinckx's biographer claiming that he had "formed a correct idea of the state of affairs at St. Rose's," when St. Rose's did not exist, and proving his contention by Bishop Spalding who states precisely the reverse of what Maes cites him to establish.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>23</sup> SPALDING, *Sketches of the Early Catholic Missions in Kentucky*, pp. 154-155.

<sup>24</sup> MAES, *op. cit.*, pp. 175-76 (note). This author here declares that Father Nerinckx gives "a correct idea of the state of affairs at St. Rose's." But, mark! This letter was written, June 2, 1806. Fenwick was still in Maryland. He purchased the farm on which Saint Rose's Convent stands, in July, 1806, and took possession of it the following December. To prove his contention Nerinckx's biographer quotes a passage from Spalding's *Life of Bishop Flaget*, page 288. Spalding, however, says

A living, nay, an inspiring tradition in the province of Dominicans which they established tells us that those early fathers were scrupulously exact in the duties of their state of life; and that they sought, even under the most adverse circumstances, to carry out the rules and constitutions of their Order. Owing to the fact that they wrote but seldom, and to the destructive agencies of time, we have few documents bearing directly on this subject. Fortunately, however, we have enough distinctly to establish the truth of this tradition. In 1816, for instance, the Master General writes to congratulate the little band of religious on their spirit of observance. Then, an extract, in Italian, from a letter of the Provincial to Rev. John A. Hill, gives us a very pretty and illuminating account of their life, their studies and their labors on the missions. It informs us that their religious discipline and observance were all that could be desired. Community life, after the convent of Saint Rose had been established, was rigidly kept up in accordance with the rule. The choral office and the devotions of the institute were observed most religiously. The community frequently rose at midnight—never later than four in the morning. Community life was perfect. The beds were of hard straw. Even the canonical tonsure was worn by those not out on the missions; although, for prudence' sake, this practice was afterwards discontinued. Considering the trying labors and the circumstances of time and place, the Order's regulations for abstinence were perhaps followed too rigidly for the health of the community. The country was new and unsettled; eggs and butter, even vegetables, were scarce; fish almost an unknown luxury, cheese entirely so. Corn bread was the fathers' chief mainstay of life. Their beverage for breakfast and supper was warm milk fresh from the cow; for dinner it was usually water.<sup>25</sup>

that Father Muños was sent to Saint Rose's by the Order's General in 1828, to "re<sup>e</sup>stablish" a discipline that had existed there, but "had suffered some relaxation" through the "distracting cares of the missionary life." This is a far cry from what Maes would have the learned author to say: that is, no discipline had ever existed at the place. Spalding was led into an error by some notes of Bishop Flaget. Muños was sent to Saint Rose's by Bishop Fenwick, not by the Father General. Neither was his mission to re<sup>e</sup>stablish discipline.

<sup>25</sup> Father Pius J. Gaddi to Father Wilson, Rome, March 16, 1816 (Archives of Saint Joseph's Priory); Wilson, Kentucky, to Hill, Rome, July 23, 1820 (Propaganda Archives, America Centrale, Vol. iii, No. 138).



From the same document we learn that, owing to poverty, the students, and even the priests, had occasionally to do manual labor. Nevertheless, through economy in time, they managed to carry on classes regularly and to give the young men a good education. Most of them, in addition to the courses ordinarily given in seminaries, knew French and Italian. The fathers (that is, those not engaged in the college) did much missionary work. But the missions were a source of expense rather than of income to the institution. Indeed, they would have been happy had the missions brought in enough to supply the fathers engaged on them with the horses and secular clothing required for that purpose. The greatest drawback to the young province was its extreme indigence, which often made the life of its members quite trying. Yet this did not prevent them from performing all spiritual functions *gratis*. These things, however, observes the Provincial, should not deter the new recruits from accompanying Father Hill to America; for they will still find food and clothing, and with these one should be content. Their labors will bear rich fruit.

Father Wilson's statement is confirmed by a letter of Father Hill who had just arrived from Rome itself. This document is dated November 21, 1821, and is given in the London *Catholic Miscellany*, I, 327-328. He assures us that the diet of the little community was indeed "very plain," and their life "sufficiently austere." That they enjoyed good health, he seems to insinuate, was a blessing from God, who "tempers the wind to the shorn lamb."

Having delivered the tirade which has been laid before the reader, Father Nerinckx proceeds to tell how he had formed an unfavorable opinion of the English Dominicans at Bornheim before he left for America, although he hardly knew them even by name. This impression he received from friends. And to give it the greater weight he assures Bishop Carroll that his informants were among the very best Catholics of Belgium—nay, precisely the men who have been so generous to the American missions. One of them went so far as to request him not to associate with the fathers going to America, should they be on the same boat as he. His friends had told him that, in the very midst of the persecution of all the clergymen who remained loyal

to the Church, the fathers of Bornheim were able, God only knows how, to go abroad as freely as the unfaithful priests who had subscribed to the iniquitous civil constitution of the clergy. Furthermore, these Dominicans managed to buy back their confiscated property, using bonds of the revolutionary republic for that purpose. Father Wilson, he continues, was even elected to public office, was held in high esteem by the prefect of that department, and received the sons of the Church's persecutors into Holy Cross College of which he was president. These things, Father Nerinckx says he was informed, aroused a strong suspicion in the minds of all good Catholics that those friars were in at least tacit agreement with the tyrannical government. In Kentucky, he declares, Father Wilson had spoken in defense of the present deplorable state of the Church in France. For these reasons, the missionary cannot doubt but that men of their stamp (*talīs farinae*) should be handled with the greatest precaution. If they have not associated themselves with iniquity, they have at least become scandalously lax.

Father Nerinckx now comes to what is evidently the impelling motive behind his furious assault. It is to prevent the fathers from becoming the directors of Kentucky's future seminary, should they succeed in establishing themselves in the State. But if we may judge from their letters, his worry was without cause; for nothing seems to have been further from their minds. Perhaps he wished to see his fellow-countrymen, or those imbued with Jansenistic principles, in charge of this institution.<sup>26</sup>

We shall let Father Raymond Palmer tell of the conduct of the English friars in Belgium after the revolution. His sober words, besides offering an agreeable contrast to Father Nerinckx's violent declamation, bear the impress of truth and bring conviction:

After the French had established their government and peace was outwardly restored, some of the fathers, in 1795, returned to Bernhem, but durst not openly settle themselves again in the convent. In 1796

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<sup>26</sup> Although the missionary expressly states in this document that he writes unasked (*non rogatus quidem*), Maes, at the end of his rendition of it, puts in the words (and in quotation marks, as if they were a translation): "I feel all the more free, my Lord, in writing to you as I have done, . . . since you expect me to look after the interests of Religion in this region" (MAES, *op. cit.*, p. 176). These last words are not in the letter. See DOCUMENTS, pp. 76-82.

the possessions of all religious bodies were declared national property and the sale of them was decreed. A commissaire sent to Bernhem valued the property at 24,806 livres; it so happened that five pieces of the best land escaped the man's notice and were not sequestered. As a compensation the directoire executif offered the fathers [because they were Englishmen] the amount in *bons* [that is, bonds], and although those notes were available only for government purposes and their value very precarious, the fathers took them as they were better than nothing.

The property was brought to auction in April and August, 1797, and the whole was sold to a perfumer of Antwerp for 13,894 livres more than the government valuation. This perfumer was the agent of the English fathers, and so the convent of Bornhem returned to the rightful owners. The government was paid with its *bons* with an additional sum of about £700. As soon as the fathers had the house back, they formed a small community there and opened the college again. The constitutional oath was tendered to them which they refused; but a trifling bribe offered in the most barefaced manner got over the difficulty. The meanest scoundrels stood at the head of affairs; some whom the fathers had known in the lowest circumstances had thrust themselves by unscrupulous conduct into public notice and held great preferments. . . .<sup>27</sup>

The convent, as Father Palmer informs us, could not again be opened as such. The people, unable to enter the church, gathered in the church-yard for their prayers. Doubtless, the fathers, naturally less molested because they were Englishmen, cautiously administered to the sorrowing faithful. Thus they were a blessing rather than the scandal that Father Nerinckx would have us believe.

When Father Wilson, more than a year afterwards, heard of the accusations that had been made against him personally, he wrote to Bishop Carroll explaining his conduct in Belgium and his remarks in Kentucky, and offered to produce proof of his assertions. His explanation must have given the venerable prelate such satisfaction that he could now hardly have desired the proof, even had he wished it before. From the Dominican's letter we learn that his argument in Kentucky was to call Father Badin's attention to the difference between the accidentals of religion, or discipline, and the essentials, or doctrine. This he did only to defend Pius VII, then so sorely tried by Napoleon Bonaparte, from accusations which the French missionary seemed disposed to lay at the door of the aged and distressed Pontiff.

<sup>27</sup> PALMER, *Life and Times of Philip Thomas Howard, O.P., Cardinal of Norfolk*, pp. 234-35.

Of his relations with the French government at Bornheim the learned friar says simply that, at the request of the bishop, the parish priest of the town and several other clergymen, he accepted, about a year before his departure for America, the position of counsellor to the mayor of Bornheim, a young, scrupulous and inexperienced man. In this capacity he assisted at three meetings of the council, in which were discussed the question of the salaries "for the midwife of our parish" and "for the person who wound up the clock of the parish church, and such like trifles."<sup>28</sup> He did not mention the fact that the fathers could not wear their habits, and for a time were obliged to live in hiding; that they could not reopen their house as a convent; and that they were able to reopen their college was because religious institutes devoted to teaching had not been suppressed by the revolution. All this the bishop knew.

Father Wilson tells Bishop Carroll that he is so conscious of his innocence of the charges made against him that he would not have written this letter, had he not been urged to do so by his brethren. But it should be noted in this connection that Father Nerinckx's sources of information about the Dominicans at Bornheim, in his letter of June 30, 1808, seem to dwindle down to one man; and he is not sure whether it was the dead Mr. De Wolf of Antwerp, or the living Mr. Peemans of Louvain, who had told him the ugly things narrated in the document just discussed.

Shortly after writing this letter, Father Nerinckx refused longer to attend the mission of Holy Mary on the Rolling Fork, where he was not remunerated for his services.<sup>29</sup> Prior to this, he had thought of joining the Trappists who were then in Kentucky. But now his troubles seem to have turned his thoughts in this direction more seriously than ever. The following year, Bishop Carroll, writing at the request of Father Badin to dissuade him from such a purpose, took occasion to say:

Perhaps it [the inclination to join the Trappists] proceeds from the difference of opinion, and consequently of practice, betwixt you and some of your brother clergymen on certain points of morality. If such be

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<sup>28</sup> October 14, 1807 (Baltimore Archives, Case 8 B, L 7).

<sup>29</sup> Father Wilson to Bishop Carroll, August 25, 1806, as in note 5; Father Badin to same, November 20, 1806 (Baltimore Archives, Case 1, H 6).

the case, you have certainly recollected that this happens everywhere, in all the countries, which I have been in. Often, the rectors of adjoining parishes have imbibed different principles. Each follows those which he approves the best, and as long as they are tolerated by the Church, he suffers his neighbour to pursue them, tho' he himself pursues a different course.<sup>30</sup>

In the meantime, it having been rumored that Father Badin would likely be appointed the first ordinary of Kentucky, complaints of the most emphatic character against that missionary's extreme harshness and severity began to arrive at Baltimore.<sup>31</sup> So matters wore along until June 30, 1808, when Father Nerinckx wrote to Bishop Carroll the letter of which we now speak. It is another outpouring of bitter invective against the friars and the people. In his opinion, things are going from bad to worse; and still more serious consequences are to be feared. He thus sums up his charges under four headings:

1°. The dissensions, arrogance and tumultuous impudence of the people of Kentucky began with the coming of the Dominicans. Why these fathers did not inquire on their arrival, as he had done, what virtues were to be implanted, and what vices eradicated, he cannot understand, unless their aim was either to please the people, or to advance their own interests. He doubts whether they have gained the first purpose; but in temporal matters they have met with fair success. They have done nothing for the common good of religion. Whatever they get, they apply to their house. The church of Saint Ann is in the same state in which he left it. Perhaps they intend to transfer it to Saint Rose's. He fears the same fate for the church which he had intended to erect in Springfield. Saint Ann's Congregation, when he had charge of it, was given to the cultivation of every virtue, and was the most exemplary in the state. But now, he *hears*, all this has passed like a shadow. Marriages with Protestants are contracted with the utmost facility. Dances are permitted in the day time, and are no sin. In Saint Ann's Parish, in Scott County, and on Simpson's Creek, where "the

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<sup>30</sup> Bishop Carroll to Father Nerinckx, April 12, 1807 (Baltimore Archives, Case 10, D 2); Father Badin to Bishop Carroll, February 17 and March 14, 1807 (*ibid.*, Case 1, I 1 and 3).

<sup>31</sup> These charges commenced to arrive in Baltimore late in 1807, and continued through a great part of 1808.

cat gut" electrifies the feet at that more comical than evangelical practice, dances and marriages always end in tumult. At times these fathers do some missionary work, but only when there is hope of gain. When there is nothing but labor in view, they claim to be religious only. Again, he would emphatically call them to a stricter religious discipline, and have the General of the Dominicans send to Kentucky some men of his Order imbued with its spirit. Of course he means imbued with Jansenistic views. But now Father Nerinckx is not sure whether it was from Mr. Peemans of Louvain, or Mr. De Wolf ("of happy memory") of Antwerp, that he received the evil reports about the fathers at Bornheim, of which he had spoken in a previous letter.

In reply to the charges under this heading let it be said, first, that Father Nerinckx's own letters show that there had been troubles and loud complaints in Kentucky before the coming of the Dominicans. Of the fathers' zeal and self-sacrifice enough has been said to clear them from these renewed accusations of laxity, of selfishness, of want of religious observance. Of this latter the missionary could have known nothing, for the reason that he kept away from Saint Rose's. Nor is it anywhere stated that the friars made the same exactions on the purses of the people as the other two missionaries. Had they been grasping, it is hardly probable that they would have always been in such dire poverty. Maes' assertion (*op. cit.*, p. 173) that: "Many negligent Christians took a malign pleasure in going to the Dominicans and contributing more for their buildings than even the richest were asked to do for the support of their parish priests," is fiction pure and simple. Secondly: it was quite natural that, in those days of few priests and much to do, Saint Ann's and Springfield, as neither place was more than two miles from Saint Rose's, should be merged into the latter parish. This was a matter of economy for the greater good. Father Nerinckx should have told the bishop this circumstance. So also should he have told him that Simpson's Creek was under Father Badin's care, not that of the Dominicans. And he should have added that, although the superior of the friars had sought to place Father Angier at Saint Francis', Scott County, in compliance with the bishop's request, Father Badin had so

far thwarted this arrangement and attended the parish himself.<sup>32</sup> Thirdly: real history tells us that, in spite of Father Nerinckx's statement, the Cartwright's Creek Settlement, for which Saint Ann's was built, was never more faithful to its religious duties, or in a better spiritual condition, than after it was placed under the administration of the Dominicans. To this day it remains one of the most exemplary parishes in the State. To this day a mixed marriage is almost unheard of in the congregation. As to the lawfulness of decent dances, the Church, through her theologians, speaks for herself.

2°. Under this heading the good man turns his attention to Basil Elder of Baltimore. There lives in your town, he says, a crafty, contemptible fellow. His name is Basil Elder, but it should be Basilisk; that is, a fabled serpent whose very breath was fatal (*Est apud vos versepellis quidam de grege homuncio, Basilus, melius Basiliscus, Elder*). He has emitted his poison even unto these parts. Through his letters, which are handed about to be publicly read (but Father Nerinckx *has not seen any of them*), he has, though "unprovoked by me, heaped insult and injury upon me," until he is held in contempt by all good people and even by the more honest Protestants. "I forgive him from my heart [he continues], for I admit in him the crassest and most stupid ignorance. . . . He who wrote that list of accusations is a brute rather than a man. . . . I most sincerely believe (*sincerissime judico*) such a man utterly unworthy of any sacrament, until it is established beyond all doubt that he has repaired the scandal given. That sneak (*ille tenebrio*) boasts that he has the approbation and endorsement of your Lordship for all, or nearly all, that he says." Father Nerinckx doubts not that this assertion is gratuitous and mendacious. Should it be true, however, and should Elder's letters contain what they *are said* to contain, the missionary does not see how the affair can be remedied, unless the last chapter of the Book of Esther suggest a way.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Badin's interference with the bishop's arrangements for Saint Francis' Parish may be seen in several letters of the day, including some of his own. His officiousness in the matter eventually aroused the venerable prelate's displeasure.

<sup>33</sup> In his rendition of this part of Father Nerinckx's letter Maes (*op. cit.*, p. 178) substitutes "B— E—" for Basil Elder. "B— E—" is also made the instigator of the complaints, for which there is no evidence. The most opprobrious epithets

Doubtless the reader has noticed the extravagance and the lack of charity in this language. They become the more patent, when it is remembered that Basil Elder was an exemplary Catholic and the father of the late saintly Archbishop Elder of Cincinnati. Webb informs us that he was trusted, admired and beloved as a friend by the first seven archbishops of Baltimore.<sup>34</sup>

Basil Elder's relations lived in the Cox's Creek Settlement, now Fairfield, Nelson County. And it was from this section that the greater number, as well as the most damaging, of the complaints were sent to Baltimore against Father Badin who was in charge of this mission. From this it will be seen how unfair and groundless is the following imputation by Father Maes (*op. cit.*, pp. 176-77): "It was especially in these places [that is, in Springfield and Saint Ann's Parish], where his [Father Nerinckx's] influence was no longer felt, that his enemies exerted themselves in the most shameless manner to destroy whatever good he had effected; the Dominicans holding themselves aloof, or being perhaps unable to counteract the evil influences of these rebels."<sup>35</sup>

3<sup>o</sup>. Under the third heading of his letter Father Nerinckx gives us a list of the accusations against him. As far as he can find out from what has been said or written, and from an examination of his conscience, these are, he says:

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applied to Elder by Father Nerinckx are suppressed, and the bitterness of the attack further toned down by dividing the paragraph, and putting a part of it on page 181: "*Tali dedicatore*," etc. Basil Elder's identity is still further disguised by a footnote (*op. cit.*, p. 181), which represents him as a Kentuckian who "was in Baltimore at the time, and had had an interview with the Bishop." But Father Badin's letters, as well as the present document, with its "*apud vos*," leave no doubt as to who "B— E—" was, or as to where he lived. The name Basil Elder, although given in full by Father Nerinckx, is again rendered "B— E—" by the same author (*op. cit.*, p. 180), in No. 10 of the accusations against the missionary. Still again (*op. cit.*, p. 186), we find Father Anthony Sedilla given as "Anthony ———." One wonders why all this suppression of the identity of others, whilst the Dominicans are brought out so prominently. The answer to this question we leave to the reader. See DOCUMENTS, p. 87.

<sup>34</sup> WEBB, *op. cit.*, p. 123. See also the *New York Freeman's Journal*, October 22, 1869, and *Character Glimpses of the Most Rev. William Henry Elder*, pp. 11 ff.

<sup>35</sup> We have found only one person in Saint Rose's Congregation writing against Father Badin. This was in 1808, and the complaint was about that priest's action in regard to land attached to Saint Ann's. All the other complaints were from places attended by Badin. Some of the "rebels," as Father Maes calls them, afterwards retracted what they had said; but, unfortunately, there are not wanting signs that the retractions were made under some duress.



1. I insist on the people rising at 4 A. M. Rev. Father Fenwick is my accuser on this head, and that is the hour which he himself should keep. But he is deceived when he says that I deny absolution to those who sleep longer. If he knew what the Jesuit Fathers introduced in Paraguay, and the devotions practiced in Belgium, he would say mass at four A. M. for the negro slaves. 2. I promiscuously forbid dances as bad. 3. I prohibit promiscuous visiting between persons of different sexes. 4. I forbid and am opposed to marriages with heretics, etc. 5. Before marriage, I require preparation for the banns and frequentation of the Sacraments. 6. I prescribe rules to be followed in the married state. 7. On Sundays and holy days, I order public prayers to be kept up all the morning, but with intervals of rest. 8. I make continual exactions for the building of churches: fortunately, they do not say that I make them for myself. 9. I forbid excess in clothing and unseemly ornamentation. I will add that I even have women censors of mature age to see that this rule is observed in church. 10. I am too bitter and harsh in giving corrections, etc. Basil Elder calls me a tyrant. 11. Finally, with me is too much confinement [*sic* in his own English; that is, he imposes too much constraint].

As Father Nerinckx then proceeds to glory in the fact that this list represents his ministerial practices, no more need be said here than that they show an excessive severity and Jansenistic rigorism which should have been held in check. It may be remarked, however, that Father Fenwick's character obliges us to believe that he troubled himself about the first complaint no further than to smile and to tell the people that they did not have to obey.

4°. In this paragraph the missionary says that many are greatly afflicted by these accusations and offer to sign a protest against his calumniators. But this he will not allow, as he has wronged no man. He leaves everything to God. He rejoices that no earthly hope brought him to Kentucky, that he has received no temporal reward, and that whatever providence has bestowed upon him he has used for the greater glory of God. The affair grieves him principally because the knowledge of it may make his fellow-countrymen less disposed to come to the mission. Still he will not cease to invite them. Then he asks for an *exeat*.<sup>36</sup>

We do not wish to say that Father Nerinckx did not write

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<sup>36</sup> This violent letter is in the *Baltimore Archives*, Case 8 A, U 5. See the complete original in DOCUMENTS pp. 85-88.

this letter with a good intention. Yet we venture to believe that the reader can hardly have failed to detect running through all the document a strain of too much sensitiveness; of too pronounced a combative spirit; of too little consideration for others; and of too strong a conviction of being always in the right, as well as of a marked indisposition to allow either honesty, good-will, or the possibility of correct views in those who ventured to think or to act differently from the Belgian missionary. A previous letter shows that he had been greatly irritated on hearing that Father Wilson had spoken unfavorably of the famous Rev. Cornelius Stevens, whom Father Nerinckx considered a second Saint Athanasius.<sup>37</sup> Impartial history, however, by no means places Stevens on so high a pedestal.

Father Badin's letters are at once more numerous and, as a rule, of greater length than those of his friend. One of those to which we wish particularly to call attention was commenced November 20, 1806, and finished February 9, 1807. The other was begun March 10, and completed May 6, 1808.<sup>38</sup> But since to give even a *résumé* of them would not only extend this article to undue length, but would repeat much of what has already been said, suffice it to state that they are of the same personal nature, and characterized by the same extravagant language and accusations, and the same lack of proof and charity as the documents which we have reviewed from the pen of Father Nerinckx. Both these zealous missionaries were unmerciful to those who did not accord with their views.

Although himself only an ordinary theologian, Father Badin affects to belittle the theological attainments of the early friars and says they are afraid of the learning of Father Nerinckx. But to us the evidence seems to point the other way. More than once the fathers requested Bishop Carroll to use his good offices in order to establish a system of conferences for the clergy in Kentucky, and to suggest some common ground on which

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<sup>37</sup> Nerinckx to Carroll, January 1, 1807 (*Baltimore Archives*; Case 8 A, U 3). This document is really only the postscript of a letter that cannot now be found in the archives. Together with a letter of March 21, 1807 (*ibid.*, Case 8 A, U 4), it shows that Father Nerinckx made another onslaught on the Dominicans at this time, and that his principal object was to prevent them from getting charge of the future seminary.

<sup>38</sup> Respectively in the *Baltimore Archives*, Case 1, H 6 and I 6.

they could agree. He did so in letters to Father Badin; but the letters were never shown to the friars, nor their contents made known to them. The conferences were never held.<sup>39</sup> The only author whom Father Badin seemed willing to follow for such a purpose was Antoine, a theologian of a pronouncedly rigorous type whose views pleased those imbued with Jansenistic principles.

Like his friend, Father Badin accuses the early friars of all manner of intrigue, as well as of a covetous, worldly and grasping spirit, lack of zeal and seeking an easy life. They tell the people, he asserts, of the want of harmony among the clergy; let it be understood that the Dominicans, because religious, are not subject to the bishop; declare that the other missionaries are too severe; and otherwise sow the seeds of trouble and discord. But again the evidence seems to point in the opposite direction. In one place, the French missionary, evidently to make his charges the more personal and effective, goes so far as to send Bishop Carroll what he calls a quotation from a letter of Fenwick casting a slur upon the Jesuits. On the margin of the document at the side of this assertion, the prelate has written: "Is not this a breach of private correspondence? Is it revealed to me for any beneficial purpose?" But, we think, the bishop had no cause for apprehension. Fenwick's letters and character, no less than his dealings with the Society of Jesus, offer the strongest rebuttal to Father Badin's charge. Indeed, that nothing really injurious to the reputation of these early friars occurs in the manuscript literature of the time, is certainly proof positive that they were men of edifying life and truly priestly character. And in this connection, it should be further noted that the Frenchman's letters reveal not only great love and admiration for his Belgian friend, but implicit confidence in his judgment. They show clearly enough how well founded were the often expressed fears of the Dominicans, that the Flemish clergymen's influence served to bring into fuller play the ultra severe and Jansenistic principles of Father Badin, which lay at the root of the discontent among the people, the complaints they sent to the bishop against him, and his charges against the friars.

Of Father Wilson's learning sufficient has been said. So also,

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<sup>39</sup> This is shown by several of Fenwick's letters to Carroll.

though not so profound or so widely read as he, were his colleagues all college-bred men, and possessed of considerable erudition. Like Wilson, Tuite and Angier had won academic honors. Both were lecturers in sacred theology. Again, apart from what has already been said, and the hallowed memories in which they have ever been held by their later brethren, let it be noted, in opposition to Father Badin's gratuitous assertions, that it would be difficult today to find four priests more disinterested than were those four early friars in Kentucky. Certainly they did not deserve all this vituperation. This is the more evident from the fact that the gentle and humble and holy and unselfish Fenwick is singled out as the principal offender—doubtless because the French missionary imagines the future bishop to be still the superior, although he had voluntarily laid down the reins of authority months before. In some of the French missionary's correspondence Angier and Tuite are acknowledged to be gentlemen of pleasing ways and polished manners.

A later document shows that Bishop Carroll was much displeased with many of Badin's actions, and with his letter of March 10-May 6, 1808. The missionary was evidently taken severely to task. In spite of this, however, he sought to justify himself in his characteristic way. The result was a letter begun August 29, and finished October 7, 1808. It is from this that we learn of the bishop's displeasure. It is a document of more than thirty-nine closely written pages, in which its writer endeavors to defend himself by minute explanations, a renewal of his former charges, and the assistance of select friends.<sup>40</sup>

Through all the unpleasantness the friars wrote but seldom—only when obliged to do so through duty, charity or self-defense. Their letters, calm, temperate and judicial, even under the trying circumstances, show not only a broad and kindly spirit, but much self-possession. More than once, as has been stated, they requested the bishop to designate some middle course in which all could concur. On the other hand, Fathers Badin and Nerinckx, stern, inflexible and unable to see any views except their own, wanted no compromise. Neither of them, as far as we have been able to find, ever sought the advice of the bishop in the matters under dispute. Nor did they follow his suggestions. They left nothing untried to have him condemn the Dominicans.

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<sup>40</sup> Baltimore Archives, Case 1, I 10.

That Bishop Carroll held all these priests of Kentucky in high esteem is certain.<sup>41</sup> It is also certain that he sought to bridge over their differences. His marginal notes and underlining on the letters from Fathers Badin and Nerinckx show that he was often perplexed, if not vexed. Precisely what he said in his letter to the French missionary that brought forth Badin's long reply of August 29-October 7, 1808, cannot now be known. But the fact that the unpleasantness, although the two clergymen continued to hold their rigid principles, begins to wane from this time, would indicate that the good prelate must have insisted on more charity and more moderation. Perhaps, too, the part the Dominicans took, in 1809, in helping Father Nerinckx to escape the administratorship of Louisiana, to which he had been appointed, had its share in the establishment of a better understanding. By the time of Bishop Flaget's arrival in Kentucky, Father Nerinckx, it would seem, had learned to esteem the friars. And during his last years in Kentucky Father Badin appears to have regarded them as his best friends. Indeed, while abroad, the French missionary made two unsuccessful attempts to join the Order of Saint Dominic for the American provinces. Failing to become a member of the First Order, he made his profession as a Dominican tertiary, and returned to the United States to labor under Fenwick, who was the bishop of Cincinnati.

The following words of Father Wilson, written to Bishop Carroll some seven months after the friar reached the missions, present, we think, a fair idea of the state of affairs in Kentucky at the time of the arrival of the Dominicans in the state.

The men [he says], both young and old, of this poor country are very shy of Priests. A little good nature will, I hope, in time bring many to their duty. Some already drop in by degrees. Not one in twenty frequent the Sacraments—few since they left Maryland. They will not be driven, they say. And indeed, with good words, they will do almost anything for you. Considering their poverty, they are beyond expectation generous in our regard. I hope Almighty God will bless their good-

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<sup>41</sup> Of the Dominicans, for instance, Bishop Carroll, writing to Father Concanen, November 21, 1806, says that they are "exceedingly and deservedly beloved" by all; and that he views them "as choice auxiliaries conveyed hither by the special appointment of Providence to instruct the young and the old, to extend our holy religion and preserve by their lessons the integrity of Catholic faith" (Archives of the Dominican General, as above). This letter was written when the unpleasantness was at its height, and there is absolutely no indication that the great prelate ever changed his opinion.

will and desire of seeing Priests, as they call them, of their own. I hope we shall agree with Mr. Badin, whose principles, with those of Mr. Nerinckx, are somewhat rigid in many points. But this will be an affair of some prudence and forbearance.<sup>42</sup>

The characteristic of the people of Kentucky noted by the learned divine, more than a century ago, remains a characteristic of them to this day. No more stubborn people can be found anywhere if one attempts to coerce them. One would look in vain for a more docile people if those who should guide them are but kind and lead the way. Father Nerinckx also remarked this trait of the Catholics in Kentucky. Had he and Father Badin adapted themselves to the spirit of their flocks, doubtless not only would their ministrations have been more acceptable, but the fruits of their labors at once more abundant and more lasting. In his famous letter of June 2, 1806, the Belgian missionary says to Bishop Carroll:

Nevertheless, I will add this in favor of these people: however refractory very many of them are, they offer, in my opinion, much hope for good; if the directors of their souls, be they ever so exacting (or, if you will, even strict), are only kind and gentle, and show sympathy for their weakness. Harshness terrifies and repels them; but paternal piety wins even the unwilling.<sup>43</sup>

Father Nerinckx seldom mentions the names of those with whom he had had trouble, but Father Badin was less cautious. In this way we learn that their differences were with some of the best and most influential Catholics in the state. Such, for instance, were the Spaldings, the Hamiltons, the Lancasters, the Elders and the Simpsons. In speaking of these families, Father Badin even surpasses the acerbity of Father Nerinckx. A fair appreciation of the French missionary's character and practices may be found in the following words from his own pen:

Mr. Nerinckx says that I mean well, but that, in his opinion, I take the wrong means to gain the confidence of the people. My success in that difficult [affair] and many other affairs for fifteen years undoes his opinion.<sup>44</sup>

Attention has been called to the kindly attitude and spirit of the Dominicans, and to their views of the unpleasantness. Let us now give two concrete examples of this as exemplified in Fenwick. Writing to Rev. Robert A. Angier, who was still in

<sup>42</sup> July 25, 1806 (*Baltimore Archives*, Case 8 B, L 5).

<sup>43</sup> See note 20.

<sup>44</sup> See note 40.

Maryland, he tells his friend that he may have Father Badin as a companion on his way to Kentucky. Then he writes:

He [Badin] has not yet offered me any of the church lands he once talked so much of. He even objects to giving us the little tract belonging to the chapel which we serve, and which was bought for the Priest who should serve it. . . . For the peace of the Church here, and for the sake of harmony among us, I wish you would request of Bishop Carroll to examine into his and Mr. Nerinckx's whole practice, and to require a clear and minute statement of the whole—and of ours—, and to pronounce whether they or we are singular in our practice, and which of us must reform.<sup>45</sup>

The other example is contained in the closing words of a letter of Fenwick to Father Concanen. The statement was written more than two months after the selection of a bishop for Kentucky and is the only one in which the friar so much as refers to the affair in all his correspondence with Rome. Here he writes:

I have never mentioned to Rev. Mr. Badin that I had leave to admit him in our Order, as I found, on my [second] arrival in the country, his attachment and zeal for us were no longer the same as at our first meeting. His mind, we believe, was changed by associating with a new missionary from Flanders, Rev. Mr. Nerinx, who seems to have imbibed prejudices against us, and to have instilled them into the mind of Mr. Badin. Mr. Badin is a zealous and active man on the mission, and will likely do better under his own control and the Bishop's than in our Order. He is generally more zealous than prudent—in fine, much of a Frenchman. Consequently I think he is an unfit man to be Bishop of Kentucky. I wish him not to be, for our sakes, and for religion in general. Bishop Carroll, in a letter to me, says he fears his nomination will be unpopular, though he was in the first place, recommended among others, in consequence of his zeal and long service in Kentucky, having been [for] some time the only Priest there. I do not mean or wish, dear Sir, to hurt the good man in your opinion, but to say, though he is a man of real merit, yet [he] is unfit to fill a Bishop's place, on account of his overbearing, hasty temper, and his harsh, strict and rigid practice in *Sacro Tribunali*. This, I know, is Bishop Carroll's opinion. If you have any influence in the Pope's Council, you will serve us and the Church in Kentucky by preventing his nomination. The good Doctor Carroll is our real friend.<sup>46</sup>

With this quotation from a document which is a fair exemplar of all the friars' letters on the question, we may close an episode which, even if it is somewhat sad, need offer no cause for shock

<sup>45</sup> Fenwick, Kentucky, to Rev. R. A. Angier, Maryland [1807] (Archives of Saint Joseph's Province).

<sup>46</sup> Lexington, Kentucky, July 10, 1808 (Archives of the Dominican Master-General, Codex xiii, 731).

or scandal. As long as men, even clergymen (be they ever so good), remain in this land of trial and probation, such things will occasionally happen. Saints Augustine and Jerome are an example in point. Fathers Badin and Nerinckx were ever the attacking parties; the others necessarily on the defensive. We have dwelt on the unpleasantness at some length, much against our liking, only because misrepresentation, the interest of true history and a just defense obliged us to such a course. Though the affair can hardly fail to throw something of a shadow on the names of two ambassadors of Christ which we should like to see glow with all possible luster, it casts no serious reflection on their character. Neither does it detract from their reputation for piety and apostolic zeal.

Few priests, we venture to believe, can examine the documents in the case and fail to pronounce the teachings and practice of the Dominicans not only kindlier, but saner, more Catholic and better calculated to bear good fruits. Unlike Father Howlett, who deftly insinuates that it is a question whether these friars were a real benefit to the missions, those in possession of first-hand evidence will be constrained to declare the presence of the Dominicans in Kentucky at that time an undisguisable blessing to both the Church and the people of the state.<sup>47</sup> That they were regarded as such a blessing by the Catholics at large, no bad judges, we think undeniable history. As tells us a traveller, writing from Elizabethtown, Kentucky, January 14, 1825, Fenwick and Wilson, the two fathers specially censured by the Belgian and French missionaries, were idols in the State. They won the hearts of all—the former by his zeal and “engaging and unaffected manners,” the latter by his “moderation and extensive ecclesiastical learning.”<sup>48</sup>

It is with a feeling of no little relief that we now close this ungrateful article. It has been written, we repeat, solely in vindication of good men who have been unjustly maligned.

REV. VICTOR F. O'DANIEL, O.P., S.T.M.,  
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<sup>47</sup> HOWLETT, *Life of Rev. Charles Nerinckx*, pp. 163-164. Although this biographer is not so unfair as Father Maes, one must needs be blind not to read his thoughts between the lines. It is indeed strange that neither of these authors could find time to say a single good word of the future bishop of Cincinnati and his companions in religion.

<sup>48</sup> *United States Catholic Miscellany*, July 20, 1825.